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I appreciate this opportunity to submit written testimony to urge you, the Appropriations Committee of the General Assembly, to ensure the continued funding of the Permanent Commission for the Status of Women (PCSW). I am the Executive Director of Advocacy for Patients with Chronic Illness, Inc., and have worked closely with the PCSW for years. I strongly support their continued funding.

As some of you may recall, when I served as an Assistant Attorney General from 1993 through 1999, I represented the State in litigation to protect access to a reproductive health care facility in Bridgeport. Later, when I was in private practice, I represented the same clinic, defending it against costly, baseless litigation aimed at closing it down. Since this clinic was the only clinic in that part of the State that served women on Medicaid, it was critical that we keep it open. I could not have succeeded without the support and assistance of the PCSW, which helped organize public and media support for the facility.

Now that I work full-time as an advocate for patients with chronic illnesses, I have come to better know the PCSW's work in the area of health care. Of course, we all know that women in Connecticut would be without insurance coverage of contraceptives and overnight stays for mastectomies were it not for the PCSW. But the PCSW has quietly led the Connecticut Women's Health Campaign, which has worked to promote the health of all women -- including caregivers, the majority of whom are women -- in our State.

Personally, I have benefitted greatly from the PCSW. The PCSW allowed me to believe that I could start my own business and become economically self-sufficient. When I have been at critical junctures in the growth of my business, the PCSW's leadership has always been available to counsel me and assist me to ensure our longevity.

When I think of Connecticut without the PCSW, I picture a very different Connecticut. The leadership of the PCSW -- from Leslie Gabel-Brett to the late, beloved Ruth Pulda to the fabulous Teresa Younger -- have been essential to the character of Connecticut. We are a State in which women are equal and can succeed because of the leadership provided by the PCSW. It saddens me that a woman Governor -- who might not be Governor were it not for the work of the PCSW promoting the inclusion of women in public positions -- could fail to recognize the critical nature of the PCSW's presence. Women can afford to be less afraid to shoot for the stars because the PCSW has always been there with support, encouragement, and important public policy work.

You will, no doubt, hear from many Connecticut citizens about the work of the PCSW because it has played such an integral role in so many of our lives. The Commission's work is legendary, but the

Commission's importance goes beyond its many accomplishments. The PCSW makes Connecticut a safe place for women to live, work, succeed, and thrive.

There is a reason the word "permanent" is in the name of the PCSW. For a Commission to be truly independent, and to work on behalf of underrepresented minorities, it must not fear for its continued existence. The Commission's permanence is part of its success. Women (and men) in Connecticut must be able to believe the General Assembly when it creates a "permanent" resource -- a watchdog, a defender of the unpopular, a maverick.

The PCSW's budget will not break the bank, so to speak. But its elimination will leave a void that no amount of tax dollars can replace. I urge you in the strongest possible terms to preserve, protect, and defend the PCSW, on which the women of Connecticut rely for their very well-being.

Thank you.

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